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**EXPLAINING COMPANY-LEVEL INFLUENCES ON INDIVIDUAL CAREER  
CHOICES: TOWARDS A TRANSITIONAL CAREER PATTERN? EVIDENCE  
FROM BELGIUM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although current career literature continues to build on the new career concepts that reflect a shift from ‘traditional’ towards ‘transitional’ career patterns, recent research presents a different reality. In Belgium, among other countries, the traditional career pattern remains the dominant picture on the labour market. This study seeks to explain this discrepancy between theory and practice by focussing on the meso-organizational influences on career choices of individuals. Drawing on Schmid’s model of a transitional labour market, this qualitative empirical research explores the factors at company level that individuals point to as obstructing or facilitating career transitions. Results show that the existence of obstructing determinants at company level is one of the reasons why the ‘transitional career’ hasn’t become reality on the Belgian labour market yet. Implications for practitioners and policy makers are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade organizations have been facing the tough task of managing their employees' careers in a time of transition (Baruch, 2003). Witnessing two broad trends of change in the career landscape respectively with regard to job mobility and labour market mobility, a shift of focus from 'traditional' toward 'transitional' career patterns is induced within the new career literature (Eby et al., 2005).

The *traditional* career path as it was known in the past – starting with a period of education followed by 30 or 40 years of employment in one or two organizations and ending with retirement at the age of 65 – is said to be abandoned. First, with regard to job mobility, employees no longer spend their entire career in one organization (Hecksher, 1994). Second, with regard to labour market mobility, commitment to working life is no longer dominating employees' time management. Other social occupations such as family life, education, household, care and leisure time are gaining importance (Van Dongen et al., 2001). As a consequence labour market mobility is nowadays characterized by multiple switches or *transitions* between employment and other social spheres (Muffels et al., 2001; Soens et al., 2005).

Following this changing nature of careers, innovative concepts have emerged in management literature, such as the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), the 'protean career' (Hall, 1996) and the 'post-corporate career' (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997), which reflect the shift from traditional towards transitional careers (Eby et al., 2005). However, this wealth of theoretical models regarding new career patterns in the existing literature contrasts sharply with recent research that shows that in Belgium, amongst other countries like France (Dany, 2003) or the Netherlands (de Koning et al., 2002; Dykstra, 2003), career patterns for the most part turn out to be shaped in accordance with the traditional model (Vandenbrande, 2001; Forrier et al., 2004; Heylen et al., 2005). Thus while the new career literature puts forward the figure of atypical career patterns, research shows that the shift towards 'transitional' careers is less radical than it seems. In order to be able to declare this discrepancy between theory and reality, a full understanding of the factors that influence the employee's decision-making process when outlining their career path – either in a traditional or a transitional way – is essential.

Ozbilgin et al. (2004) introduce three levels of analysis to study influences on career choice: the micro, meso and macro level. The new career literature gives precedence to the micro level and focuses on individuals shaping their own career. But while this new literature starts from the assumption that firms no longer cause careers, research has shown that external clues continue to mark the shape of a career (Dany, 2003). Individual agency cannot be considered in isolation from contextual factors at the meso level such as company related influences (Ozbilgin et al., 2004), since the organization constitutes the middle ground where careers are played out. Prior research has reported both influences at the micro and meso level of analysis as a key influence on career choices (Kyriacou et al., 2002; Ozbilgin et al., 2004). In addition, the career outlining process is considered to be a shared responsibility of both individuals and their employers (Orpen, 1994; Sturges et al., 2000). However, little research has examined the influence that organizations may exercise on the individual's career decision making process by means of their policies and practices. Yet the latter can play an important role in the individual's career trajectory as to whether or not he or she decides to undertake a transition. In particular, company-related factors can stimulate or hinder career transitions between jobs or between employment on the one hand and other social spheres like education, activities in private households and other forms of non-professional activity on the other (Buyens & Wouters, 2001; De Vos, Dewettinck & Buyens, 2006).

For this reason, it is the objective of this study to investigate which factors at company level underlie the individuals' decision making process when making or not making a career transition. More specifically, we seek to generate a list of determinants at the company level that aid or restrict the process of outlining a career path by subjecting company-related factors to the opinion of the individual employees involved. Furthermore, in view of the current activation debate, gaining more insight into the issue of job and labour market mobility is not only interesting from a scientific point of view, but also highly relevant both for HR professionals and labour market policy makers. Insight into the factors that prevent individuals from moving between different labour market positions, and those which have a stimulating effect, is an important precondition for the implementation of effective policy measures.

Using a qualitative approach, this study sets out to examine how companies through their human resource practices can influence people when outlining their career. It will do this through the following research questions: (a) To what extent is company policy (in the widest sense) decisive for people's choices regarding mobility? and (b) which factors at company level do the persons concerned point to as obstructing or facilitating career choices?

We begin by drawing a picture of mobility on the Belgian labour market and call attention to the divergence between new career theory and Belgian reality. Next we amplify on the model this study draws on, i.e. Schmid's model of a transitional labour market (1998). Data gathered from focus groups are then used to uncover meso-organizational determinants of individuals' career choices and consequently their influence on the design of the Belgian labour market in terms of mobility. Finally we discuss implications for practitioners as well as for labour market policy makers.

## **CAREERS IN THE BELGIAN LABOUR MARKET**

Notwithstanding the prevailing rhetoric about new careers in literature, empiricism shows a dominant presence of traditional permanent employment in the Belgian labour market (Forrier et al., 2004; Heylen et al., 2005). Heylen et al. (2005) found that almost half of the respondents in their analysis on the Panel Study of Belgian Households (PSBH) did not undertake any career transition at all during the reference period 1992-2000. Almost half of this group worked in full-time employment. Other important statutes within these stable careers were the traditional occupations of retirement and education. Based on these findings, Heylen et al. (2005) drew a career typology, which clearly shows that stable, permanent full-time careers are still the dominant pattern in the Belgian labour market and have not (yet) made way for new 'transitional' patterns. Still, one in five respondents makes three or more transitions during the 1992-2000 period. But although the less traditional career transitions (e.g. job hopping, part-time work etc.) make up a larger group within these rather dynamic careers, it is remarkable that even in the latter, full-time employment occupies a central space.

In their career typology Heylen et al. (2006) also assess the differences between vulnerable and less vulnerable career types by analysing person- and labour related determinants of career paths. It occurs for example that women tend to dominate the more vulnerable transitions like work interruption or difficult (re)entry into the labour market and that men are overrepresented in strong positions like job hoppers, easy entrants and permanent full-time jobs (Heylen et al., 2006).

The establishment of a ‘transitional labour market’ requires both the will on behalf of individuals and the means on behalf of organizations to make and respectively facilitate career transitions. With regard to the first aspect, Bollen et al. (2006) found that the average Belgian worker doesn’t make much effort when it comes to managing his or her own career. Belgians continue to think in terms of a traditional career and are only concerned about employability with their current employer (Verbruggen et al., 2005; Bollen et al., 2006). The question is however, whether such behaviour is caused either by micro-individual or by meso-organizational influences. Do organizations for example insufficiently support their employees in making career transitions or do they constitute considerable hindrances to making transitions, so that individuals refrain from taking initiative? This study sets out to investigate this role of meso-organizational influences in the career decision-making process of individuals and how this determines the degree of flexibility of the Belgian labour market.

### **THE TRANSITIONAL MODEL OF SCHMID**

The transitional labour market theory of Günther Schmid (1998) constitutes a dynamic framework to explore the ways in which organizational mechanisms can facilitate or hinder career transitions. Schmid (1998) puts forward five possible positions on the labour market, between which career transitions can take place: employment, unemployment, education, non-paid activity and retirement (see Figure 1). Thus five types of transitions are possible that reflect labour market mobility: (1) the transition between education and employment, (2) between non-paid activities and employment, (3) between unemployment and employment, (4) from employment to retirement and (5) job mobility i.e. all kinds of transitions inside of the employment-box (transitions between various working time regimes or various working locations, transitions to a different organization, to a different sector...).

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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Schmid (1998) recognizes that the concept of transition in itself is not a ‘new’ phenomenon on the labour market, but draws the attention to the hard conditions under which these transitions often take place in reality, as for example the entry into the labour market by young graduates or the return to employment by work interrupters. For this reason Schmid argues that the borders between the labour market and other social systems have to become more open for transitory states between paid work and gainful non-market activities which preserve and enhance future employability. In other words, company policy should encourage individuals to find the ideal combination between paid work, care, education and leisure time in accordance with their individual life cycle (Schmid, 1998).

While Schmid’s theory in the first place concerns a normative framework specifying a potential labour market model, at the same time it has a clear analytical component. It obliges researchers to investigate careers and labour markets from a dynamic perspective. It is from this point of view that this theory is applied in this study. We will elaborate separately on each one of the transitions.

## **METHOD**

Data gathered from focus groups were used to achieve our goal of exploring which company-level factors individuals point to as obstructing or facilitating the particular career transition they are involved in. A total of 111 individuals took part in 11 focus groups. We have two reasons for using a qualitative research design. First, there is the complexity of the research theme. The individual decision-making process when tracing a career path and the factors influencing the decision cannot be captured by means of quantitative survey research (Hutjes & van Buuren, 1992). The qualitative form of research is, on the contrary, extremely suitable for the in-depth collection of data on the many aspects that could play a role, with the ultimate aim being to have a grasp of the total picture of individual reflections and perceptions. Second, the emphasis on reliability (unambiguousness, replicability) in quantitative research is at the expense of validity (richness, depth and relevance) of the results (Hutjes & van Buuren, 1992). In-depth exploration with and collection of information from the subjects themselves therefore again militates for qualitative research.



## **Access to the data**

Research into behaviour is often based on a significant degree of non-representative samples that are compiled on the basis of the researcher's judgment (Fern, 2001). Furthermore, in qualitative research, the importance of external validity or the extent to which the results of the research can be generalised is subordinate to the necessity of understanding and the in-depth analysis (Gosselin, 2002). This justifies our choice to recruit from a selective number of sources, so-called 'purposive sampling' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990), when recruiting focus group participants. Our priority was to find participants who fulfilled the required profile for the specific focus groups to enable a wide-ranging and in-depth study of individual perceptions. Recruitment of focus group participants occurred on the one hand on an individual basis and on the other in co-operation with organizations. A target group of employees was defined within the organizations in consultation with the persons in charge, on the basis of the sought-after profile. Table 1 gives an overview of the profile of the focus group participants, which is based on the career typology of Heylen et al. (2005), and the procedure followed to recruit participants.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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## **Organization of the focus groups**

The concrete implementation of the focus groups was based on the available literature regarding focus group research (Fern, 2001; Greenbaum, 2000; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Two to three focus groups were organised per research topic, taking into account the saturation principle (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morgan, 1997). On average some 10 persons were brought around the table in the focus groups so that they could give their own opinions and experiences and go into greater depth about a number of statements that were put forward (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In order to limit possible influences such as group conformity and social desirability, we implemented an element of the Delphi technique (Hellendoorn, 1998). The set of questions was specifically developed in relation to the qualitative purpose of the research and consisted of open questions representing research questions. Before starting the discussion about these questions, participants were asked to write down their individual views. In line with the literature on 'best practices' for organising focus groups, use was made of the 'funnelling approach' (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The focus groups were started with more general questions to get the discussion going and then gradually went over to more specific questions, explicitly related to the transition being researched.

## **FACILITATING AND OBSTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES AT COMPANY LEVEL**

A summary of key findings with regard to positive and obstructing factors at the company level for each transition is presented in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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### **The transition from education to employment**

As pointed out earlier, some transitions in Schmid's model do not regard revolutionary kinds of labour market mobility, but do require considerable attention given the difficult conditions under which these transitions take place today. The transition from school to work is a first example of this kind of problematic traditional career steps. Investigating this entry into the labour market transition, we interrogated both young graduates with a university and a technical degree. A lot of the conditions under which they enter into the labour market, are shaped by the employers' recruitment behaviour in terms of recruitment channels, job advertisements, selection criteria and tools, and co-operation with education institutions in terms of internships (Taylor & Bergmann, 1987; Gorter et al., 1993). We asked the graduates about their opinion on these elements in the context of their transition from school to work. First, our focus groups revealed that – contrary to popular belief – even people with a university or post-university degree may experience a hard time in getting a job nowadays. Extensive theoretical knowledge is no longer the ultimate asset to impress the recruiter as organizations seem to attach a bigger value to work experience. Hence young graduate respondents perceived the *selection criterion* of work experience as one of the biggest hindrances for getting a job (Gorter et al., 1993). Graduates with a technical degree on the other hand, feel very optimistic about their chances of employment. They suffer more from society's undervaluation of their degree, forcing them into choices that do not match their capacities.

With regard to *advertising channels*, the general picture we ascertain in the field, is that both recruiters and job seekers more and more turn to electronic information and communication channels. Research on this trend is still in its early stages (Bartram, 2000; Lievens et al, 2002; Anderson, 2003). To complete prior studies that compared advertisement through the internet to advertisement through traditional channels (Rozelle & Landis, 2003), our results give insight into how young graduate job seekers with different levels of education evaluate E-recruitment and its tools. Our university graduates state that given the abundance of advertisement channels – without detracting from the ease of finding information on vacancies thanks to E-tools – there is a risk of overloading job seekers with information in such a way that they find it impossible to assimilate the data. For this reason, they identify a need for some kind of an all-encompassing search tool in order to facilitate data assimilation and to direct searches through to all kinds of sources of job opportunities. Technically skilled graduates for their part haven't found their way to E-tools yet, and mainly look for jobs via informal channels such as personal contacts, acquaintances or family. As their most important requirement with regard to a job appeared to be proximity to their home, they consider lack of information about nearby employers as an obstructing element.

Furthermore, the specificity of the information provided to job seekers is an important message attribute (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). In our research, *job advertisements* are not judged to be completely accurate. According to all young graduates, job titles or function descriptions can be very unclear and misleading. Graduates do not always completely understand what the function incorporates and consequently ignore whether this is something they would like to do or not. This lack of information results in many graduates wasting their time in applying for a job which later turns out to be the complete opposite of what he or she is looking for. Another criticism of job advertisements is that profile requirements are sometimes stated very generally. For example, what is meant by 'flexibility' or 'work experience is a plus'? Does this second requirement exclude young graduates or not? As a result job seeking graduates cannot accurately ascertain what companies mean by these terms.

The issue of co-operation between education and business institutions in terms of internships, mostly applies to students with a technical degree. Most of them start working at their trainee or holiday/weekend job post. They consider an *internship* as the ultimate steppingstone to employment and lacking such an experience is seen as a strong obstructing factor. A graduate noted: "They remember your face. They get to know your capacities and see whether you are motivated". To the contrary, among university graduates, views differ greatly on the usefulness of internships.

While some respondents see their internship as a useful topic of conversation at the application interview, others regret that companies do not recognize an internship as a beneficial experience. In any way, the success of an internship is heavily dependent on the efforts of the company to make the job content of the trainee as interesting and varied as possible. So can trainees benefit largely from an internship experience where they work up to concrete results they can take with them at future applications (Ruelens et al., 2003).

In terms of studying the reactions of applicants on *selection tools*, a significant body of knowledge has investigated this issue either from a psychometric/economic (Macan et al., 1994) or from a marketing perspective (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Anderson, 2003; Bauer et al., 2004). Whereas these studies have helped to develop a clear understanding of the psychometric soundness and validity of tests or the utility of selection procedures on the one hand (Gilliland, 1993), and applicants' perceptions in view of company attractiveness and job acceptance on the other (Macan et al., 1994; Powell & Goulet, 1996), they do not give clear explanations as to how these selection procedures influence the applicants' perception of their step from school to work. Our research bridges this gap. Results indicate that young graduate job seekers perceive all kinds of selection tests like analytical tests, psychological tests, tests of presentation and negotiation skills etc. as a considerable stumble block to their entry into the labour market for several reasons. For example, some respondents perceive these tests to give a completely distorted view of the candidate. Given the strained conditions under which these tests have to be taken, the results may not give a correct indication of the candidate's ability and motivation. Furthermore, our applicants critically evaluated the consistency and reliability of these tests. One student commented: 'in some companies you fail the tests, in others you pass and you don't know why'. For this reason, questions arose about the validity of the criteria that the different recruiters apply. Even though we need to nuance these remarks from the point of view of non-hired candidates, the great deal that respondents make of it, indicates the importance of this practice as an obstructing factor to a smooth transition from school to work. Participants also raised the problem of an acute lack, not only of a preparatory manual with best practices to tackle a thorough assessment, but also of receiving feedback afterwards. The latter finding indicates the shortcoming on behalf of recruiting companies with regard to managing this feedback process and taking into account the viewpoint of the applicant. Contrary to selection tests, selection interviews were evaluated rather positively. The personal contact allows the applicant to illustrate his or her motivation and to put forward his or her case properly.

Nevertheless, in a one-to-one interview, only one person decides upon this fit or otherwise between the applicant and the organization. To overcome this kind of subjective selection, participants in our focus group preferred panel interviews.

Finally we monitored the one-way *communication* activity of the recruiting companies, which also appears to be a particularly important feature of the recruitment process (Rynes et al., 1991). Almost everyone in our focus group complained about the delay of response to the candidates after selection tests or interviews took place. In the case of a positive response as well as in the case of a negative one, it may take a very long time before the company informs the applicant. In the worst-case scenario, the applicant gets no news at all which renders the application process impossible to manage.

To conclude on this first transition, results clearly show a difference in perception regarding the ease or not of entry into the labour market between university and technically skilled graduates. Whereas university graduates strike a negative attitude towards the process of looking for and finding a job when evaluating their transition from school to work, the technically skilled respondents do not have a negative approach towards finding the connection with the labour market in itself, but towards the general recognition of their degree in society. Hence, technically skilled graduates do not blame the recruiting company in the first instance in case of difficulty to find a job ('the application process mainly concerns an 'easy chat'), but the current hierarchy in the Belgian educational system.

### **Transitions between professional occupations**

Secondly, our focus group research dealt with career transitions that come under job mobility, such as transitions to a different function, to a different organization or to a different sector. Within this context of job mobility, the shift from traditional towards transitional careers reveals itself. The traditional career path on the one hand, concerns the well-defined and fairly predictable linear upward career trajectory in the internal labour market (Arthur, Kapova & Wilderom, 2005). The 'new' or 'transitional' concept of career on the other, holds career moves both in the internal labour market, like lateral or horizontal movements, temporary movements, movement 'in place' by job enrichment etc. (De Vos, Dewettinck & Buyens, 2006) and in the external labour market, like job hopping. The latter relates to the concept of 'boundaryless' careers.

Our results show that, abstracting from the traditional or transitional nature of job mobility, all participants consider the fact of having the opportunity to make a career move within the organization – either in a vertical (promotion) or a horizontal (development) way – as extremely important. However, in reality there appear to be big differences in the extent to which organizations have successfully implemented and operationalized career management practices with a view to support their employees' careers. A first category of organizations that participants spoke about in this respect, are those who lack any kind of policy that helps to detect and support employees' career aspirations. In these cases, it is completely up to the employee to take any initiative concerning his or her career. This category appears to cover most of the smaller organizations represented in the focus groups, as one person said: "I am working in a family company where career support is not an issue. You have to do it yourself. In bigger companies there are more possibilities in terms of advancement and counseling".

A second category is defined as organizations that have an excellent career management system in theory, but fail to successfully put it into practice. For instance, one participant stated that information on employees' career expectations is indeed being collected but not properly processed. Instead, vacancies are still filled by means of the informal circuit.

A third category of participants considered their organization as to belong to 'best practice' in the field of career management, actively using career orientation interviews and personal development plans. In all instances, having or not having a problem with a lack of organizational career support is entirely dependent on the employee himself. Some people leave a company because of a lack of career opportunities, others feel comfortable with a less structured and ad hoc system. For this reason, respondents think that in the first instance, career management needs to be tailored to each individual's needs, either being vertical growth, horizontal growth, both or none.

As said, *vertical advancement* within one company is central to the notion of 'traditional' careers. Notwithstanding the fact that in many organizations vertical career paths are the only formal career structures that exist, our findings confirm the existence of many shortcomings or hindrances at company level when it comes to supporting this traditional upward pattern. In particular, organizational career practices stimulating vertical growth (Gutteridge et al, 1993; Baruch, 2004) can get stuck due to several practical hindrances on the work floor. For example, several respondents said that in fact, they have been sitting on the same chair for the last few years and have simply been given more and more responsibilities instead of making a real career move. Another shortcoming that appeared is a loss of freedom of choice.

This was typified by one person who said: “Sometimes you cannot refuse an offer to change jobs since someone else has already taken your current position”. When discussing company-level obstructers to vertical growth, respondents also referred to the organizational structure as flatter organization structures limit career growth opportunities. Furthermore, some respondents emphasized that some positions can only be reached by people with a master degree. Another concern that respondents highlighted is that many times executives fail in their role of career counselor (Sonnenfeld, 1984) or lack appropriate knowledge about the competencies and skills of their employees. It is obvious that this is an essential condition to let employees move on to a job suited to their needs and capacities. To conclude on vertical career transitions, the keyword that prevailed in each of the focus groups was communication. Respondents felt a strong need for clear communication from the employer about the organizational possibilities regarding careers and opportunities for movement in the internal labour market. They say that “there is a lot of talking but few clear communication”.

As far as ‘transitional’ job mobility in the internal labour market is concerned, respondents identified two problem areas on horizontal pathways: at the organizational level and at the individual level. First, from an organizational perspective, moving people between different departments or business units may not be as easy as it seems. Respondents quote an unsuitable organizational structure or reluctant management as examples of obstacles to gaining cross-departmental experiences. On the other hand, the problem might be situated at the individual level since taking up other responsibilities requires particular competencies and skills. In this respect, respondents expressed their concern about overestimation of abilities which may end up with people in the wrong posts.

Finally, with regard to transitions on the external labour market, respondents argue that career moves between different organizations require a far more mature approach, both on behalf of the employee and the employer. Employees as well as employers may benefit from cross-organizational exchanges in terms of gaining experience and getting a different perspective on things. For these ‘boundaryless’ careers to occur, communication needs to become far more open to break all taboos and distrust.

Thus, organizations affect employees' career decisions through their organizational career management practices. Those organizations that stimulate and support horizontal career movements on the internal labour market or do not hinder boundaryless careers on the external labour market, facilitate the appearance of transitional careers.

On the other hand, those that stick to formal vertical career structures anchor the existence of the traditional vertical career on the internal labour market and hinder the appearance of transitional career moves. Our focus groups also suggest that currently the latter is still the largest group. Holding on to traditional vertical career structures might of course correlate with organizational size, age or sector.

### **The transition between employment and non paid activity**

We now turn to the issue of combining employment and non paid activity such as housework, care-taking activities or leisure time. Today, the striking increase in the number of women in the workforce and the reduced willingness of employees to sacrifice family life and leisure time for the sake of a career, heighten the organizational awareness of work-life balance issues (Friedman et al., 2000). Within the framework of Schmid's transitional labour market model, we distinguish two kinds of career transitions for the purposes of a better balance between work and life: transitions between employment and non paid activity and transitions within the employment box in terms of working time or working place arrangements. In this respect, employers can install flexible working practices to facilitate these transitions and to act on the employees' call for flexibility. These measures can be classified into three categories: (1) working time and leave regulations (part time working, flexi-time etc.), (2) work organization regulations (teleworking, home-based working etc.) or (3) facility regulations (child care, sport facilities etc.) (Danau & Van Dongen, 2002). Our research revealed that, while flexible working practices appear to be a positive thing from the private life perspective (for instance people have more time for family and children), they can cause many difficulties for employees in the work context. Indeed, prior research has shown that there are some practical hurdles to overcome when implementing a flexible working programme (Hutchinson & Brewster, 1994).

The discussions on the first category, *working time and leave schemes*, were predominantly related to problems in the field of promotion policy, work load, redistribution of people and communication and co-ordination. First, respondents who spoke negatively about reduction of working hours highlighted their frustration at being passed over for promotion or even interesting projects (Branine, 1999; Buyens & Wouters, 2001). One person commented: "Part time working would be bad for my career, it would restrict my future opportunities". Furthermore, part time workers expect to have difficulty when looking for another job, either inside or outside their organization.



Not many interesting vacancies mention that part time workers are allowed. As the difficulties of work load (Branine, 1999) and disproportionate adjustment of objectives were the pitfalls that subjects referred to most, the answers should be mainly situated in this perspective. This was typified by a person who said: “We have to realize 100% of the objectives in 80% of our time, we complete 5-day work in 4”. Related to this is the problem of filling up the gaps caused by working time reductions. Respondents observe a natural reflex of management to react on less full time equivalents by overloading colleagues. They state that the success of part time working etc. is heavily dependent on goodwill on behalf of the colleagues. However, in order to avoid structural work overload on their behalf, respondents express a strong need for strategic top management support in this matter (Illegems & Verbeke, 2001). The final difficulty that respondents refer to in the context of working time reductions is communication between colleagues or within teams as well as towards customers. Exchange of information and passing on internal knowledge becomes more difficult if people spend less time in the office (Sels & Dejonckhere, 1999).

With regard to *work organization regulations*, the concrete implementation on the work floor of teleworking or home-based working was said to mainly encounter obstacles in technological support and again communication (Dambrin, 2004; Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). In this respect, there was little concern about appraisals or promotion policies and loss of supervisory control (Perlow, 1995). All respondents whose employers had introduced tele- or home-based working considered appraisal systems to be sufficiently adapted and did not have any problems with self discipline. However, home-based workers did not deny that they lose visibility within the organization and by consequence miss out on interesting projects. An important issue with regard to technological support is the huge investment cost that home-based working and teleworking bring along. For this reason, respondents see that home-based working remains a privilege for a select group of workers while they claim that every employee should have the right to work at home if the job allows it.

Finally, results indicate that respondents attach greater importance to working time and leave schemes and work organization regulations than to *facility regulations*. Despite the fact that particular facilities are being appreciated, they are not seen as a decisive condition to well-being at work. In fact, perception of facilities very much appears to be a personal matter. Whilst some people for example really appreciate sick child care, others do not want to link their children to their employer.

Along with this, being able to benefit from organizational facilities depends on all kinds of practicalities like distance to the car wash, the way you travel to work (“You can’t get on the train with your laundry basket”) etc. In short, those people who respond to company facilities are mostly satisfied, but this kind of regulation does not appear to be critical for job satisfaction.

To conclude on the issue of work-life balance, Schmid (1998) argues in his transitional labour market model to encourage and facilitate individuals to find the ideal combination between paid work and other social activities. Our focus groups reveal however, that many hindrances at company level are still to overcome to do justice to flexibility in practice.

### **The transition from unemployment to employment**

This leads us to the fourth transition in Schmid’s model of a transitional labour market which is the transition from unemployment to employment. Investigating this transition we interrogated white-collar workers and executives on the one hand, and blue-collar workers on the other. The majority of participants’ opinions relating to the application process and more specifically *recruitment channels* and *testing*, were similar to young graduates’ feelings. Yet, results give evidence of a number of answers typical of elder job seekers. First, the white-collar and executive group perceived the application process as extremely frustrating as very often *response* to their multiple applications remains forthcoming. One person expressed his frustration in the following way: “The application process becomes more and more frustrating because of the lack of response on behalf of the recruiter and the uncertainty this creates”. For this reason, they strongly argue in favour of some kind of a methodological approach to the application process in terms of a clear-cut step-by-step plan so that applicants receive feedback at relevant stages.

Furthermore, white collar and executive job seekers highly appreciated the internet as an *information source*, but regret that most of the vacancies are intended for younger applicants. On the other hand, young graduate job seekers for their part complain of the requirement of work experience. To summarize, it seems that vacancies posted on commercial jobsites are mostly meant for young job-hoppers in the context of pure job mobility, whilst the most important target groups in the labour market are young graduate and older unemployed job seekers.

Although it is the intention of *recruitment and selection bureaus* to facilitate the inflow into employment, it was remarkable that there was much resentment towards this kind of recruitment channel. More highly educated job seekers posed major questions with regard to the quality of the available jobs and the ethics of recruitment and selection bureaus, whereas those with lower education levels have more problems with the distances they are asked effortlessly to cover or the speed with which they have to be available if they go through this channel.

As far as *selection criteria* are concerned, the white-collar and executive job seekers mainly have to put up with financial, age-related or qualification-related arguments. The blue-collar job seekers spoke of stigmatization and discrimination, amongst other things, on the basis of appearances (Gorter et al., 1993; Gorter, 2001; Vos et al., 2000).

Furthermore, neither target group felt happy about *non-permanent contracts*. There were some negative attitudes towards temporary work because of the less favorable financial aspects, uncertainty, lack of continuity, lower status of the job and lack of a bond with the job or with the employer. One person explained: “Now I am 50 years old. If I accept a temporary job, I have to apply again within a year. Who would want to hire me then?” Finally, we asked participants about their perception of *outplacement* since all were involved in this kind of counseling. Both target groups were completely in agreement about the fundamentally positive contribution of outplacement (Denolf et al., 1999). White-collars and executives remarked in this respect that psychological counseling should be a very important aspect of outplacement taking into account that every person finds himself in another stage of getting over of the dismissal (Butterfield & Borgen, 2005). Blue collar participants commented that one should pay close attention to those people who do not accept an outplacement offer as they could end up in a vicious circle of unemployment. Nonetheless this is often a difficult job as some laid off workers no longer wish to have anything to do with the former employer and refuse any help.

### **The transition from employment to retirement**

The last transition this paper is devoted to is the final step in the professional career, i.e. the transition from employment to retirement. In view of the current debate in Belgium on encouraging the elderly to work longer (OECD, 2004), we first present the perception of older workers of their transition to retirement and their attitude towards postponing retirement (Lim, 2003; Kee-Lee & Chow, 2005).

All but one of the blue and white collar respondents accepted their employer's offer to retire early at the age of 55 and stated that they did not encounter big problems when passing through this transition. They say their transition was sparked by several reasons which at the same time, are at the root of their 'satisfied' feeling regarding their career ending (Kremer & Harpaz, 1982). First, the current economic phenomenon context characterized by delocalization and downsizing has been shown to be a serious source of uncertainty. Therefore, the retirement decision appears to be strongly driven by the unwillingness of older workers to go through those changes once again. Furthermore, they stop working because their fellow workers have left too or they wish to make the most out of retirement. Common early retirement schemes too often serve merely to make older workers redundant but they also make the transition to retirement more palatable. On the contrary, the executive respondents – who had to retire at the age of 60 due to restructuring – felt themselves forced into retirement while they were willing to work for a longer period (Kee-Lee & Chow, 2005). Hence, they perceived their career ending as an abrupt transition for which they didn't have any preparation time: "We had a full agenda until our last working day. It was as if the lights were turned off all of a sudden."

Although we found considerable differences between blue/white collar workers and executives regarding their perception of the end-of-career transition, it was remarkable that both were very well aware of the need to work longer for economic and socio-juridical reasons. In addition, both groups appear to be prepared to prolong the latter stages of their career. However, at the same time respondents attached a number of conditions to working longer (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2005). The main condition appears to be carrying on with a job at one's own pace. According to respondents, quality of life in terms of lowering the pressure of work and creating more leisure time is the highest good. Another circumstance where respondents want to work past the presumed retirement age is when they can continue the same job. Older workers – blue and white collars as well as executives – seem to be strongly averse to the unknown, as several persons confirmed: "If you can continue to work in the way you are used to, then you are prepared to work longer than foreseen". Furthermore, executives appear to be more inclined to stipulate added value in their job for working longer whereas blue and white collar workers rather think in terms of one or maximum two extra working years. In this respect, organizations can accommodate their policies to the needs of older workers and develop particular practices in response to their specific needs.

Literature to date offers a range of different initiatives in the area of HR that can be part of such an action plan with a view to induce those people aged 55 and above to remain active (Dytchwald et al., 2004; Saba & Guerin, 2005). Notwithstanding these calls for an 'age-conscious' approach were heard and discussed in operations (Employment Administration, 2002), there seem to be a number of organizational barriers on the work floor which undermine successful implementation. Firstly, according to respondents, age as a selection or redundancy criterion is and remains a fact in practice (Chiu et al., 2001). Participants said they are judged on their high personnel cost and lack of continuity. In addition, those concerned feel stigmatized by being an 'older' employee. As a consequence (re)appreciation of this age group is imperative. In this respect, a fundamental change of mindset is required, but it is a well known fact that this kind of change is happening only slowly. As regards the perception of training, we were once more confronted with opposite opinions based on hierarchical level with on the one hand, blue and white collar workers, not coming to recognize the need for educating older workers and executives preaching the ever urgent need for learning, on the other. Furthermore, all considered mentorship very useful for purposes of recognition and transmission of know-how, but in practice it risks missing its target by lack of, or tardy, follow-up. Workers in particular add modifications to working time arrangements (no more shift work) as a precondition for a longer career. In addition, modifications in job function content were perceived as a strict necessity for working longer to all those asked, but a lack of 'lighter' jobs to move into was observed for reasons of outsourcing or downsizing. One person commented: "In the past you could run down by switching to a job in the warehouse for example, but now all those alternative jobs have disappeared or have been outsourced". Finally, the benefit of exit jobs was clear to all, but all kinds of practical or organizational obstructions (such as nature of the job or function, overloading other employees, management resistance, lower value of part-time workers, limited availability etc.) are preventing this path from actually coming to fruition. To conclude with regard to exit jobs, respondents stressed their concern not to study older workers in aggregate and establish practices which can be applied across their whole population, but to offer a whole range of possibilities so that each worker can make choices tailored to his or her specific needs.

The interpretation of the transition from employment to retirement in the traditional model, is no longer applicable in today's labour market. Under the current circumstances of an ageing workforce, postponement of retirement and return to the labour market are of crucial importance.

Hence, to elder workers too, the ‘transitional’ career model needs to be applied, in terms of flexible transitions back to employment. However, our research shows that both organizations and individuals don’t walk the talk regarding this line of thought. In the end, in practice both employers and employees still easily agree on early retirement systems, respectively for reasons of productivity and financial causes, and to benefit from this system as long as it exists.

## **DISCUSSION**

Reçi and de Bruijn (2004: 2) state that “the theory of transitional labor markets has received a wide attention, not only from the academic discipline of sociology (Schmid, 1998; O’Reilly & Bothfeld, 2003; Wilthagen, 2001), but also from other disciplines such as economics (Muffels, 2001; Gazier & Schmid, 2002; Auer, 2002; de Koning, 2002), organization theory (Rubbery & O’Reilly, 2000) and law”. The contribution of this paper is that we concentrate on the application of this model in human resources as part of organization theory, yielding important insights for human resource management with regard to labour market and job mobility. Although a significant body of knowledge has examined the conditions and implications of this model at the macro level (Reçi & de Bruijn, 2004), implications at the meso level, in particular corporations being the middle ground where careers are played out, is an important yet understudied area. The organization itself is affected by most macro variables, yet it has its own ability to aid or restrict the employee’s process of outlining a career path through its processes and policies (Buyens & Wouters, 2001). In the first place this study was motivated by a desire to understand the role of organizations in establishing a transitional labour market through facilitating or hindering their employees’ career transitions. Furthermore, we noted that previous research on mobility and careers has put the main emphasis on either the individual component (individual career management or ICM) or the organizational component (organizational career management or OCM) with regard to this issue. For this reason, the goal of this study was to understand reactions of individuals particularly concerned in a career transition to company-level determinants. In this respect, our study helped us to better understand to what extent company policy is decisive for people’s choices regarding mobility and which factors at company level the persons concerned point to as obstructing or facilitating choices. For this to occur, we conducted a qualitative oriented research by means of focus groups.

Our findings suggest that the dominant presence of traditional permanent employment on the Belgian labour market shown in prior research (Heylen et al., 2005), is being reflected in contemporary organizational policy. Notwithstanding the elaborate literature on company arrangements that may support employees' career transitions, the results of this study provide evidence suggesting that concrete implementation of these practices on the work floor may bump into all kinds of practical and organizational barriers. For instance, job seekers located a whole range of obstructers in the consecutive HR activities they are confronted with during the application process. Flexible work practices for their part appear to be condemned to fail in the absence of required modifications in the work environment and exit jobs are considered to overshoot their mark because of a lack of organizational support.

As a consequence, we can derive from our findings significant implications for managers as well as authorities. Firstly we need to make the observation that when inventorising the determinants of the (professional) career at company level, we came up against indistinct boundaries between 'facilitating' and 'obstructing' factors. What is seen in theory as a facilitating circumstance, can in practice be undermined by the manifestation of a raft of organizational side-effects, as for example part-time work and reduced promotion opportunities. Or vice versa: even if an obstructive factor is being worked on, the risk of becoming stuck in the same area of tension still lurks around the corner. Therefore it is important for company and government policy to be thoroughly aware that determinants are intertwined at inter- and intradisciplinary level.

As to the traditional *transition into employment*, results clearly show that giving information and process guidance are important pillars of a policy that aims to lead job seekers into jobs. Even more important in the view of the target group in question is a stricter follow-up of the extent to which recruitment bodies (both the temping sector as well as recruiting organizations) follow the ethical code. Organizational awareness of their responsibilities however, will not be a sufficient motivation for organizations to recruit in a 'labour market aware' manner. A company is not a social institution, but a profit-driven entity ruled by economic interests. If authorities want to bring in the business world on board, then the incentives will have to match up with their economic driving force. Thus we already see today that companies can much more easily be induced to make greater efforts when it concerns vacancies for which they have difficulty in finding suitable workers on the labour market. Second condition for companies to step on board is that they have the knowledge and information at their disposal that is required to be able to put such a policy into practice.

Furthermore, results indicated that the traditional *exit phase* too has its painful areas. Here we noticed a threefold mismatch, namely between what the government wants, what employers want and what employees want. The social value of the steps that have been taken as regards regulations in light of a more extended career participation is indeed recognized by the various actors, but decisive translation of these steps to the actors' own motivations at meso and micro level (i.e. company and individual interests) remains a problem: 'What's in it for me?'. When it comes to self-interest, employees appear to want to end the working life earlier and employers seem to have little faith in the added value of older employees or they step back when they see the older employee's price tag. This combination leads to a noticeable early exit, whether obligatory or not. So as to give an appropriate response, policy needs to go further, delineating the necessary implementation modalities. However, at the same time results suggest that not only do the structures have to be implemented, but the culture also has to change. Policy must again direct itself to this goal on both fronts. The result should be on the one hand that employees are prepared to work longer and, on the other hand, that employers are interested in employing people for longer. Finally results indicate that organizations need to recognize that a curative approach is of limited use. Instead, a pro-active course of action needs to be stimulated. This basically means that organizations should not direct all their efforts to the present generation of 'older people' in the framework of active policy, but that the end-of-career policy must take its departure from younger generations, where mobility and flexibility are facts of life. In this respect, organizations need to consider the inclusion of interim breaks in the course of a career on the basis of flexible systems or a more flexible attitude towards job switching and looking for work.

This leads us to the issues of job mobility and work-life balance, being the transitions in which the atypical nature of the so-called 'new' career patterns is mainly shown. Regarding *throughput within organizations*, we have found that, despite several organizational obstructers, more and more companies are creating movement possibilities on their own initiative in order to stimulate internal mobility. These career developments do not necessarily relate to traditional prospects of advancement but rather manifest as horizontal growth opportunities within the scope of the current concepts of employability and lifelong learning. With respect to matters of *work-life balance*, our research shows that once again, culture is limping behind structure. Employees as well as employers must again come to the realization of the benefits of a better work-life balance, where this time around employers are, logically enough, more difficult to convince.



Nevertheless, companies will come round to the idea that they will benefit if their employees are more productive thanks to potential temporary exit or downsizing arrangements. As stated above, to this end authorities will not so much have to go down the path of being more sensitive or taking more responsibility but rather have to keep up with the economic mindset of the business world in order to stimulate them to take actions that foster flexibility.

Reality in any case shows that at company level there are more than enough factors present to sabotage effective implementation of institutional initiatives, as the organization is the agent by which these policies are applied to individuals. Nonetheless, organizations too may benefit from a flexible labour market, both with regard to traditional or transitional career steps. As to the former, the future demographic evolutions urge organizations to bring the 'obligatory' traditional entry and exit transition into focus since the number of talented applicants to recruit is dropping and people need to work longer anyway. As to the latter, a flexible labour market fostering multiple transitory states between employment and other social spheres allows organizations to make optimal use of all potential talent, like women or temporary workers. To conclude, our findings suggest that in order to give this transitional labour market model its due, government will have to win organizations over to eliminate the barriers at the meso level that individuals in our study spoke about.

### **Limitations and future research**

Like any study, this one has limitations that leave unanswered questions providing opportunities for future research. First, the breadth and scope of the labor market and job mobility theme make it difficult to encapsulate all factors that come into play with each career transition. While our study contributes to the career management literature by approaching the career concept from a life span perspective, drawing an integral picture of the individual's career course, it precludes at the same time a fine-grained analysis of each specific transition. Therefore, future research should focus more in-dept on each particular transition and complement the current findings by assessing more organizational-level factors triggering or hindering these career steps. A second research opportunity arises from the explorative and descriptive nature of our study. As with any qualitative research, issues arise about the generalizability and the highly subjective nature of our findings. Thirdly, the results of our study should be considered in view of the characteristics of our research sample.

This in-depth research was conducted with a limited number of participants which implies further cross-validation in order to assess whether the perceptions we have found also apply within different research populations. Therefore, they need further validation in future research that might, for instance, further examine the impact of organizational factors we defined by conducting a quantitative, multiple level survey about company practices and how these affect the career decisions of the employees involved. Ideally, longitudinal research should be conducted in order to study the impact of organizational factors during different career transitions throughout the career lifecycle at the intraindividual level, by following a panel of employees from their first steps into the labor market until their retirement. Despite these limitations, we believe our explorative research serves as a valuable basis for future research on career transitions.

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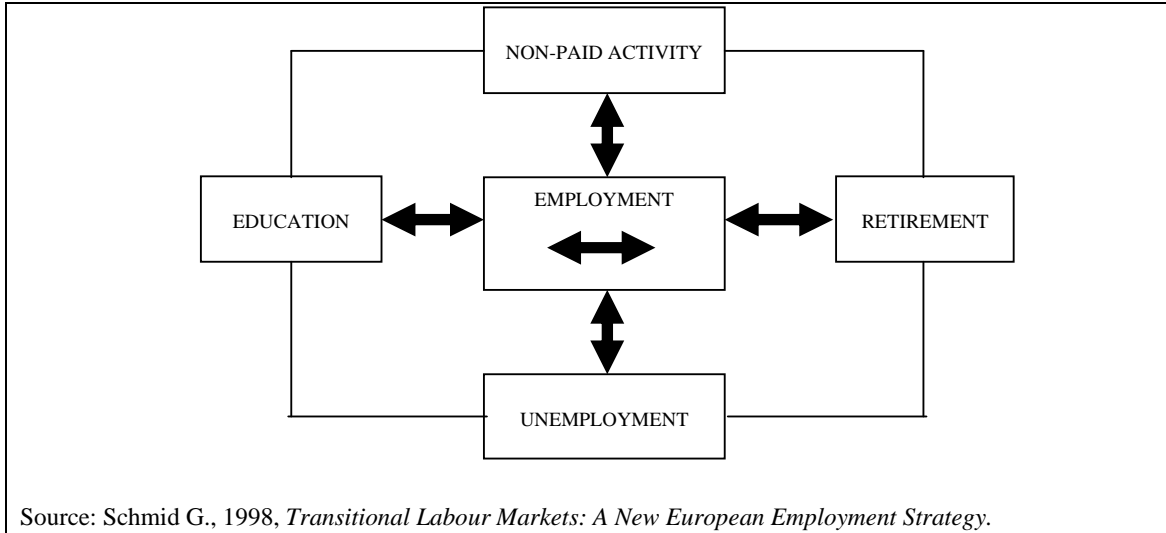
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**FIGURE 1**

**Labour market policy as a strategy of transitional labour markets**



**TABLE 1****Focus groups details**

	Subject profile	Number of participants	Individual	In co-operation with an organisation	Total number of focus groups
Education – employment	- University graduates	10	x		1
	- Technical school graduates	8	x		1
Non-paid activity – employment	- White collar workers	13	x	x	1
	- Executives	12	x	x	1
Within employment	- White collar workers/executives	9+6	x		2
Unemployment – employment	- Blue collar workers	11		x	1
	- White collar workers/executives	9		x	1
Employment – retirement	- Blue collar/white collar workers	9		x	1
	- Executives	9+15	x	x	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>111</b>			<b>11</b>

**TABLE 2**

**Overview of career facilitating and obstructing factors at company level**

	<i>FACILITATING DETERMINANTS</i>	<i>OBSTRUCTING DETERMINANTS</i>
<b>TRANSITION FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT</b>	<p>Recruitment policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recruitment channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ E-tools: accessibility, abundance of information</li> <li>▪ Informal channels: personal contacts</li> <li>▪ In-house trainings, holiday or weekend work: important intermediary for linking up with labour market (mainly technical college graduates)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Selection tools: personal discussion</li> </ul>	<p>Recruitment policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recruitment channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ E-tools: badly organized, lack of navigational tools, very time intensive</li> <li>▪ In-house trainings: not always recognised as profound practical experience (mainly for university graduates)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Unclear use of language in vacancies (job title, function description, profile requirements)</li> <li>- Selection criterion: requirement of practical experience</li> <li>- Selection tools: intelligence tests, psychological tests...</li> <li>- Communication: lack of response and feedback (mainly for university graduates)</li> </ul>

<p><b>TRANSITIONS</b></p> <p><b>WITHIN</b></p> <p><b>EMPLOYMENT</b></p>	<p>Internal job mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Vertical</i> mobility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Developed career system</li> <li>▪ Involvement of employee in succession planning</li> <li>▪ Individual career guidance from immediate superior</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Communication: need for clear communication concerning career possibilities</li> <li>- <i>Horizontal</i> mobility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lateral development possibilities: need for zigzag movement as an alternative to vertical growth</li> <li>▪ Insight into employee's competences: necessary for optimal match</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>External job mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mature approach both on behalf of employer and employee</li> <li>- Open communication</li> </ul>	<p>Internal job mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Vertical</i> mobility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of a well thought out career policy, ad hoc approach</li> <li>▪ No freedom of choice</li> <li>▪ Shortcomings of the immediate superior in role of career counsellor</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Communication: lack of transparency in practice</li> <li>▪ Organizational structure</li> <li>▪ Diploma criteria</li> <li>- <i>Horizontal</i> mobility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of possibility to move between departments</li> <li>▪ Management resistance to cross-departmental moves</li> <li>▪ Lack of insight into competences on behalf of the immediate superior</li> <li>▪ Lack of insight into competencies on behalf of employee</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>External job mobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Taboo' about leaving a company</li> <li>- Difficulty of exit interviews</li> </ul>
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<p><b>TRANSITIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT AND NON-PAID ACTIVITY</b></p>	<p>Work organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Result oriented culture: self-discipline instead of monitoring by superior</li> </ul> <p>Provisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appreciated but considered less necessary than working time/leave regulations and work organization</li> </ul>	<p>Working time and leave regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promotion policy: reduction of advancement opportunities</li> <li>- Pressure of work: non-reduction of work load</li> <li>- Communication and co-ordination: less contact and synchronous attendances</li> <li>- Redistribution: extra work load for colleagues</li> </ul> <p>Work organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technological support: high investment costs</li> <li>- Communication: less contact</li> </ul>
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<p><b>TRANSITION FROM UNEMPLOYMENT TO EMPLOYMENT</b></p>	<p>Recruitment policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recruitment channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ E-tools: accessibility, abundance of information</li> <li>▪ Informal channels: personal contacts</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>In-house trainings (mainly blue collar workers)</p> <p>Outplacement</p>	<p>Recruitment policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recruitment channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ E-tools: vacancies mainly available to young workers with some practical experience</li> <li>▪ Recruitment and selection bureaux: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ White collar workers/executives: quality of service offered and ethics</li> <li>○ Blue collar workers: required mobility, last-minute contact</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>- Communication: lack of response and feedback</li> <li>- Selection criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ White collar workers/executives: financially, age, overqualification</li> <li>▪ Blue collar workers: discrimination on basis of appearance, perception practical experience ≠ asset</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Short-term contracts: negative perception due to financial aspect, uncertainty, age, status, no bond with the job/employer</p>
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<p><b>TRANSITION FROM EMPLOYMENT TO RETIREMENT</b></p>	<p>Employability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training: executives: importance of constantly keeping professional knowledge up to date</li> <li>- Mentorship: knowledge transfer and recognition</li> </ul> <p>Well-being at work and quality of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adjustments to the function-content/working time scheme</li> </ul> <p>Exit jobs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive perception of usefulness</li> </ul>	<p>Balanced age pyramid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Age as a selection or redundancy criterion</li> <li>- Valuing older employees: prejudices</li> </ul> <p>Employability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training: blue collar workers: questions if necessary and useful</li> <li>- Mentorship: organizational problems (no one to give follow-up, follow-up too late, etc.)</li> </ul> <p>Well-being at work and quality of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change in job content</li> </ul> <p>Exit jobs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practical and organizational obstructions</li> </ul>
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